

Samuel H. Moffett
Princeton, Oct. 5, 1981

MISSION IN AN EAST ASIAN CONTEXT
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

One practical by-product of approaching mission in East Asia from ^{the} ~~an~~ historical perspective is that it gives the lie to the commonest ^{of all} criticisms of Christian missions in Asia, namely that Christianity is an irritating, alien, western religion that does not belong in Asia. Sometimes the criticism comes as a calculated distortion of history; sometimes it springs simply from ignorance. But in either case it ~~is~~ ^{is wrong} ~~hurts~~ ^{hurts}; and in both cases it ~~is~~ ^{is wrong} ~~hurts~~ ^{hurts}.

There is an illuminating entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year 883 A.D. It records an incident in King Alfred's desperate fight for the ^{Christian} ~~life~~ ^{life} of ~~Christian~~ England against the heathen Danes. London is besieged. The English are encamped against the enemy, and Alfred makes a vow. Before God and ^{before} his brave Saxons he promises that if the death-grip of the Danes on London can be broken he will send gifts to the holy places of Christendom. His prayers are answered. The pagan barbarians break off the attack and take to their Viking ships. And true to his promise Alfred sends two envoys from his precarious beach-head on the far fringes of Christendom, carrying rich gifts back to the heartland of the faith.

The interesting, and to some historians puzzling, feature of the account is that the offerings were sent not only to Rome--that was to be expected--but "also to India to St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew". (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation, Dorothy Whitelock, ed., p. 50) A later annalist, William of Malmesbury (Chronicle of the Kings of England, a 12th century document) has added that the Saxon messengers returned from India "with many brilliant exotic gems and aromatic juices in which that country abounds", gifts from the old Christians of the east to the new Christians of England.

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envoys may have gone no farther than to the shrine of St. Thomas in Edessa, or to Southern Arabia, for India was a very vague term in the literature of the period).⁵ But it is not impossible that they reached India, and the whole incident is a significant reminder that the ninth century knew what the nineteenth, and the twentieth, has too often forgotten: that Christianity is not a western religion. It belongs as naturally and historically to Asia as it does to Europe; and Saxon kings a thousand years ago felt a Christian debt not only to nearby Rome but to far-off Asia.

By way of contrast the church histories of the west even in this ecumenical age have ^{sometimes} seemed to turn their backs on Asia, and ~~most of the earlier eastern dimensions of the progress of the faith.~~ We leave Jerusalem and Antioch with Paul, and "forbidden by the Spirit to speak the word in Asia" as it were (to twist Acts 16:6 a bit), we move ^{west} as quickly as we can ~~west~~ to Greece and Rome and Plymouth Rock and rarely look back. Until, of course, we rediscover Asia with our own western missionaries. In so doing, we have done grave disservice to the cause of the Christian world mission.

When Christendom, unlike King Alfred, forgot its ancient debt to Asia, quite needlessly it promoted, if it did not create, an image of the Christian faith that it should at all costs have tried to avoid: the image ^{of a make} and recent creed, made in the west by westerners for the religious exploitation of the rest of the world.

We could have gone as ^{relatives} ~~brothers~~ returning home to pay a debt. We often tried. But we had forgotten the debt, and to many eyes we appeared more as conquerors than friends. Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit pioneer in China, tried in every way he could to take on Chinese ways and make the good news of the gospel Chinese. Every way, that is, but the historical. When he reached Peking in the year 1600, ^{though he dressed in Chinese clothes} he was still a foreigner and when he asked for an audience with the emperor the powerful Board of Rites advised the court not to receive him. "Europe has no connection with us," they wrote. This man's "teaching is of no value. Let no such novelties be introduced to the palace." Both they and the missionary alike were unaware of the historical context of the Christian mission in East Asia. Had he known that context, Ricci might have presented his request quite differently and much more powerfully. "I bring no European novelty to

China," he might have said. "A thousand years ago one of your own emperors received a Christian missionary like me with honor. He invited him to teach. He even helped him build a church." But the west had long forgotten that bit of history. And as ^{the alien} an envoy of an ^{European} unknown faith he was kept cooling his heels for six months, and never did see the emperor.

Why do we let Asia--or any other part of the world--continue to identify the Christian faith as western. ^{History goes back farther than the age of exploration} Christianity began in Asia. That is where Jesus was born. It spread south into Africa and east into Asia before, or at least as early as it moved west into Europe. And from that perspective church history takes on a different look.

The first Christian king was not ^{Constantine - not a westerner but an} Roman ^{And} but Asian. Constantine's conversion did not end the great persecutions; on the contrary, it began the greatest persecutions. When the ^{Roman} emperor became a Christian, the west rejoiced. But across the Persian border, in Asia, there was no such joy. As long as Roman emperors considered Christians to be enemies of Rome, Persia had been inclined to accept them as friends, and for two hundred and fifty years Persia had been a haven for Christian refugees from Roman persecution. But no more. When Rome became Christian, its old enemy Persia became anti-Christian and the great killings began.

The multitude of the Asian martyrs was beyond enumeration, wrote Sozomen the historian shortly after the terror had ended. The names of well-known martyrs alone made a list of 16,000. It was worse than anything suffered ^{under} in the Roman west, yet remarkably the number of apostasies in Persia was fewer, a tribute to the steadfast courage of Asia's early Christians.

The first known church building (as distinct from a house church) was in Asia; the first translation ^{a major part of} of the New Testament was ^{into an Asian tongue,} ~~from a western~~ language, Greek, to an Asian, Syriac, and the greatest missionary advance in the first 1200 years of the Christian era, - ^{too was} ~~this~~ in Asia, ^{outside} the Roman empire. In fact the most remarkable missions of all time, save in Roman Catholicism after Loyola or in Protestantism after Carey, were the missions of the Church of the East, called Nestorian, which swept

across Asia from the Red Sea to the Pacific and from Ceylon to the borders of Siberia. For a short time in the thirteenth century, what might be termed a Chinese "pop^e" ^{ruled most of the Christians of Asia} a Mongol monk who became an ambassador of the great Khublai Khan and then was almost kidnapped by Nestorian Christians in ~~what is now Iraq~~ to be made Catholicos (or patriarch) of Baghdad ~~and from there to rule most of the thousands of Christians of all Asia, from his patriarchal throne on the River Tigris.~~ "It may be doubted," says Neale in his History of the Eastern Church "whether even Innocent III [at the climax of Rome's papal ~~power~~ ^{power}] possessed more spiritual power than the [Nestorian] Patriarch in the city of the Caliphs [Baghdad]." ~~And this in the heartland of Islam.~~

It is within this context of ancient Asian history, with all the advantages that antiquity bestows in traditional Asian culture, that today's missionary to Asia can be working, but as in Ricci's day four hundred years ago, still for the most part neither the missionary ^{is} nor even ~~their~~ ^{generally} Asian colleagues are aware of it. The church in Asia deserves better than that. It has earned the right to know and honor its ^{Asian} ~~own~~ Christian heritage.

That heritage begins with a church so ancient that its origins can be told only in legend. It sprang up in two centers, one in India and one in eastern Syria just outside the Roman border, and ~~strangely,~~ both centers traced back their beginnings to one apostolic source, St. Thomas. If the traditions can be believed, the mission of St. Thomas as the Apostle to Asia predated even St. Paul and his mission to the west. Legends are not history, of course, but they are often woven around a core of history. At any rate, the Thomas tradition has been so persistently believed as to become part of the history of the church in Asia. And not just the history of the church. He belongs ^{also} to ^{non-Christian} ~~and~~ Asia. "Remember," said a ~~non-Christian~~ president of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, not too many years ago--"Remember, St. Thomas came to India when many of the countries of Europe had not yet become Christian, and so those Indians who trace their Christianity to him have a longer history and a higher ancestry than that of Christians of many of the European countries. And it is really a matter of pride to us that ~~it so happened.~~" ^{do much to soften} [Compare China and its attitude and Ricci. A knowledge of ~~its~~ history can ^{change} cultural ~~attitudes~~ ^{antagonisms} toward ~~the entry of~~ the gospel.]

^{Rough sketch}
The church's Asian, non-western dimensions begin ^{at} roughly across the Euphrates River where the Roman Empire ends in the east and Hellenistic culture meets the orient. But the story opens in Jerusalem with the eleven disciples gathered to plan a strategy of obedience to the command of Jesus, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel." It is told in an early third century document, The Acts of Thomas, one of the New Testament apocrypha. As the story begins they decide to divide up the world between them by lot, in the same way that they chose to elect a successor to Judas Iscariot. The mandate for India fell to Thomas, and immediately he had his doubts. "I'm too weak to travel that far," he said. "And besides, I don't speak Indian; I'm a Jew". The Lord appeared to him in a vision, and still he would not go. Not until the Lord took things into his own hands and sold Thomas as a slave to an Indian merchant who ^{had come looking for a carpenter for} happened to be passing through Jerusalem on a mission from his king, Gundaphar, to find a carpenter to build a palace--not until then did Thomas stop fighting his Lord and go to India. ^{Thomas is double, Thomas the reluctant missionary.} Not a hopeful beginning for an apostolate to Asia!

This is not the place to debate the historicity of that old tradition. Quite understandably scholars have not always been kind to it. Patiently they pointed out that no king by the name of Gundaphar had ever been known in India, and that the story's miracles were too obviously unbelievable. The latter objection is true. But about the middle of the nineteenth century, an explorer near the Indo-Afghanistan border turned up coins which astonishingly bore the name of an Indian king, Gundaphar. Research has dated the coins to the first century. ^{you see,} Not all legends are not all myth, though, of course, a Gundaphar in India doesn't prove a Thomas was there. ^{too.}

Meanwhile, before he was dragged off, a reluctant missionary to India, ^{another even stranger tradition} he had become associated with the ^{apostle Thomas: the} planting of the church in the other earliest center of Asian Christianity, Edessa. Edessa was the capital of a little border principality precariously preserving its independence between the warring giants of west and east, Rome and Persia. It stood at a junction of two strategic trade routes. One was the Old Silk Road running east from Roman Antioch to India and China. The other ran north and south between Africa and Syria, and on into Armenia,

No less and authority than Eusebius, the father of church history, links Thomas to the beginnings of the church in Edessa but his story is hard to believe. It is based on letters which, he says, had been found in the city archives of Edessa--letters written between King Abgar the Black of Osrhoene and no less a correspondent than Jesus himself. Abgar's letter asks for help and healing from a dread disease. The reply from Jesus properly sends regrets. "I must first complete here all for which I was sent," he writes, according to Eusebius, "and after thus completing it, be taken up to him who sent me; and when I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to heal your suffering and give you life." After the ascension this mission is given to Thomas who in turn sends Thaddeus (also called Addai) "one of the Seventy" mentioned in Luke 10 to Edessa. Abgar is healed and converted, the first Christian king in history.

The story is of course untrue. But again, even a fanciful legend may contain a truth. It is not at all impossible that a King Abgar of Osrhoene was indeed the first Christian king, and Osrhoene the first of the kingdoms of this world to adopt Christianity as its official religion. Not Eusebius's Abgar the Black, however, and not for another century and a half. The story of the letters stretches credibility too far. But there is considerable, if not conclusive contemporary evidence, as J.B. Segal has pointed out in his thorough history of Edessa (Edessa, the Blessed City, p. 70) that Abgar the Black's direct descendant Abgar the Great who ruled Edessa from 177 to 212 AD did become a Christian, and that would predate Constantine by a hundred years.

But whether or not it could boast a royal convert is only a secondary element of the mission to Edessa. Its significance lies rather in the fact that it represents a major breakthrough into another culture. It was a thrust of the gospel beyond the Roman border into Asia proper. Osrhoene was more Persian than Greek or Roman. Its rulers were Aramaic-speaking Arabs. Its religion was the Asian cult of the stars. It was oriental, not western.

Also significant is the fact that the "bridge of God" into Asia (to use McGavran's phrase) was the Jewish Christian, not the Hellenistic-Christian community. The oldest record of the evangelization of Edessa (the Doctrine of Addai, ca. 4th century) says that Addai the evangelist sent by Thomas went first to the house of Tobias, son of Tobias the Jew. It was a natural bridge. The evangelists were Jewish, and in the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia they found respected, well integrated groups already prepared for the gospel both by their knowledge of the Old Testament and by their opposition to the surrounding paganism.

The same may have been partly true in India. There were very early

Jewish communities there, and the other Thomas tradition, that of the Acts of Thomas, mentions that his first convert on the way to India was a little Jewish flute-girl at the court of the king of Andrapolis.

If the first wave of missionary advance into Asia was Jewish-Christian, the second was Syrian, east Syrian. The language of Osrhoene's ~~towns, particularly Edessa~~, was Syriac. Very early, through Justin Martyr's Assyrian disciple, Tatian, Edessa began to give the gospel to the people in their own language, not the Greek Koine. It is a measure of the importance of Bible translation in the growth of the church that not until Tatian took the gospel record out of what he felt was its imprisonment in the language of Roman Asia, ^{which was} Greek, and put it into Syriac, did it gather missionary momentum and begin to spread outside the cities into the countryside. (See F.C. Burkitt, Early Christianity Outside the Roman Empire, p. 12).

Tatian was emphatically and unashamedly Asian. "I am an Assyrian", he declared proudly in his Address to the Greeks, and went on to enumerate all the ways in which Asia (the whole non-Greek world, in fact, for he included North Africa) excels the west. Where did the Greeks learn their astronomy? From Asia. Their alphabet, their poetry and music, their postal system, even? All from Asia. "In every way the east excels", ^{he said} if I may summarize and paraphrase him, "and most of all in its religion, the Christian religion, which also comes from Asia and which is far older and truer than all the philosophies and crude religious myths of the Greeks". (ch. 1).

Edessa, and its sister border-kingdom of Adiabene, became the missionary centers for outreach into Asia. It was the mother church for ~~the church of the east~~, ^{outside the empire,} and prided itself on becoming a visible witness to the whole world. The first recorded notice of a Christian church building ~~anywhere in the world~~ is an entry for the year 201 AD in the Chronicle of Edessa reporting flood damage to "the nave of the church of the Christians". By that time its missionaries had carried the gospel the length and breadth of the Persian Empire from the Roman border to the Hindu Kush and from Armenia to the Persian Gulf.

The Syrian missionaries, apparently, ~~many of them~~, were drawn ^{largely} from the ranks of the ascetic monks of the ~~Syrian~~ deserts and caves, ^{who} ~~they~~ became the popular models of sainthood in the eastern church, ^{as also in Egypt.} There is a striking difference, however, between the better-known Egyptian hermits and their Syrian counterparts. In Egypt the call was to leave the world; in Asia, ^{except} ~~save~~ among the extremists (the Encratites) the call to self-denial

in the early period at least, was almost always associated with the call to go and preach and serve. Edessa's ascetics, instead of turning hermit became wandering missionaries, healing the sick, feeding the poor and preaching the gospel as they moved from place to place. In a study of early Syriac tradition, Robert Murray describes them as "homeless followers of the homeless Jesus..on ceaseless pilgrimage through this world." (Symbols of Church and Kingdom, p. 29). Moving ever farther to the east they crossed the deserts and began to climb the high steppes of Central Asia. By the end of the second century Bardaisan of Edessa reported that Christian groups had sprung up even among the Gilanians near the Caspian Sea and the Bactrians in what is now Afghanistan.

If so, then in less than 200 years after the death of Christ, these "homeless followers of the homeless Jesus", these missionaries of the Church of the East, had carried the faith not just across the borders of the Roman Empire but halfway across Asia.

But by then Edessa, the home base for ^{their} ~~this~~ advance into Asia, was about to be snatched back into the west. Not long after the death of Abgar the Great, the friend of the Christians, his Osrhoene dynasty came to an end and Edessa, broken from its Persian connections, became a Roman colony. The Syrian wave lost its momentum, and the third wave of advance for Asian Christianity was Persian.

As so often in church history, times of defeat clear the way for new beginnings. In the Persian period, which stretches over four hundred years from the beginning of the third to the beginning of the seventh centuries, for the first time ~~in the east~~ an organized Asiatic base for Asian missions emerges, and a pattern of missionary strategy and discipline that was to roll back the eastern frontier of the church beyond the roof of the world ~~in Central Asia~~ to the shores of an unknown sea, the Pacific.

The process was very gradual, and can be known only in part, but it began with a theological school and a theological concensus, and with a church cohesively independent but not willingly separatist, and with a missionary discipline forged in the monasteries of the east. It began with the School of Edessa, sometimes called the School of the Persians, and with the Church of the East-(that was its own name for itself)-which came to be known as Nestorian.

When Rome seized Edessa it absorbed its church into the west but drove its theological school into Persia. It is unkind to say so, but Persia got the better part of the bargain. Not that the church in Edessa declined. On the contrary it waxed strong. It produced scholars and saints and bishops. It grew rich, so rich, in fact that in the fourth century it built a solid silver chapel to house the bones of St. Thomas, reputedly brought all the way from India, two thousand miles away.

But the glory of Edessa was not a silver shrine. It was its school of theology which may well have been the oldest theological seminary in the world. It was probably in existence as early as the west's first theological school at Alexandria. ^{That would be} in the latter part of the second century. At any rate, for the next half a millennium it remained the major center of theological learning for Asia--even after it had been driven across the border into Persia, and even after Persia fell to Islam. Its language, Syriac, "became the Christian language of Asia as Latin became the Christian language of Europe". (R.A. Aytoun, City Centres of Early Christianity, p. 135).

Toward the end of the fifth century, when theological controversy in the west boiled over into the first Great Schism and blew the church apart into three pieces (Orthodox, Monophysite and Nestorian), a Monophysite bishop of Edessa, called "the Mad Dog" bishop by most of the seminarians, smelled the smell of Nestorianism in the School of Edessa. He persuaded the Emperor in Constantinople to close the school for heresy. But instead of obeying and closing, the head of the seminary, Narses, known as the "Harp of the Spirit" to his friends, but called "the Leper" (meaning theological leper) by his enemies, simply moved the school across the border into Persia, only forty miles away. Thereby the west lost its most effective channel of intellectual communication between east and west, and only Persia gained. It had been the one center where Persian Christians could study not only the Greek church fathers, but also Greek philosophy and logic; and where Byzantine Romans and Syrians and Persians met in peace not in war. All this was now lost to the west.

But once safely across the border in Asia proper, the school prospered as never before. Reorganized as the School of Nisibis it brought new life and learning surging into the Persian church. Sober, no-nonsense

Bible exegesis was the heart and center of the curriculum, after the fashion of Theodore of Mopsuestia who shunned the allegorical fancies of Alexandria and the west. Students overflowed the camel-yard ~~for caravans~~ which was the first make-shift campus. Enrollment climbed to more than a thousand ~~students~~. The fifth century rules of the school, which still amazingly survive, display the same sober, no-nonsense approach to campus life as to Bible study. Classes began at dawn. Students were forbidden to enter taverns, read secular books, beg, steal, marry, or be untidy in their appearance. (See J.B. Chabot, "L'Ecole de Nisibe, Son Histoire, Ses Statuts" in Varia Syriaca, I. 55).

The ~~same~~ tragic tensions which drove the theological school into Asia had at least one other positive result. ~~It~~ ^{They} gave the Persian church a new sense of identity, a smaller identity but perhaps for that very reason sharper. It became self-consciously national, no longer torn in its loyalties between Persia and Byzantium. ~~on Rome~~. Rejected by the west, it became Persian, independent and equal. ^{was declared} Its patriarch (or Catholicos) in the Persian capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon ^{Rome or} second to none whether in Constantinople ~~or~~ ^{in Rome,} ~~much less Alexandria or Antioch.~~

In the same way, ^{theologically} ~~rejected~~ by the west ~~theologically as heretical~~, and prodded by the teaching of the School of Nisibis, it became Nestorian. It rallied to the defense of the so-called heresy of Nestorius, whose death in exile was to the east a martyrdom. Judged by his own works, which have come to light only in the last century, Nestorius seems scarcely as heretical as the west had always thought him. At no time did he deny the deity of Christ. He merely insisted that it be clearly distinguished from Christ's humanity. ~~From this time on,~~ the Church of the East can properly be called Nestorian. It was now recognizably separated from the west both by politics as Persian, and by theology as Nestorian. It ^{became} ~~was~~ Asian.

~~It was~~ ^{From this} ~~theologically,~~ ^{and} ecclesiastically and nationally integrated center, ~~that~~ ^{now} Nestorian missions began to push irresistibly east across the continent. All along the Old Silk Road that wound like a twisted thread from the Roman border to the golden capital of China at Chang'an below the Great Wall, Nestorian missionaries began to preach to the nomad, Shamanist warriors of the steppes.

These were the Huns of Central Asia, and the missionary methods

used by the Nestorians to reach them are describes by a sixth cnetury contemporary. About the year 500 two Christian missionaries found their way into Bactria, now northern Afghanistan. Both were laymen; one a tanner. They found some Christians already there, captives taken by the Huns in raids and held as slaves. Later the two lay missionaries were joined by ordained missionaries, a bishop and four priests. The ordained missionaries stayed only seven years but the two laymen stayed for thirty. All seven, it is said, lived on a diet of just seven loaves of bread and one jar of water a day. They preached, converted, baptized, and even ordained priests from among the Huns who, they discovered, were intermingled with Turkish tribes. To their evangelism they added education and taught the Huns to write their own spoken language. Soon the Nestorian missionaries were joined by a practical, and tolerant (for he must have been a Monophysite) Armenian bishop. This bishop taught the Christian Turks how to plant vegetables and sow corn. By the end of the century there were so many Christians among the Turks that when Byzantine Rome went to war against them they found that their Turkish prisoners all had crosses tattooed on their foreheads. How ironic, as Mingana has noted, that today the word "Turk" is synonymous with Moslem, whereas in reality their ancestors were Christians before Mohammed was born. As the Moslems began to sweep into Persia from the desert about 640 AD, on the far side of the Persian Empire, Persian missionaries were exulting in mass conversions to the Christian faith. The tribal kings of the Turks were accepting the faith and bringing whole tribes into the church with them. (A. Mingana, The Early Spread of Christianity in the East, p. 303 ff.

But at that very time an even more dramatic breakthrough was taking place farther east yet. It is the year 634 or 635 AD, and as we reconstruct the scene, a Persian missionary, a monk from Arbela or Ctesiphon, joins a caravan riding the Old Silk Road from Antioch across Persia into the high snows of the Pamirs. There, somewhere in the icy no-man's land between Roshan and Fergana (both now in the U.S.S.R) at a place called the Stone Tower, the Roman caravan would meet a line of dusty camels from China, and Roman gold would be changed for Chinese silk. (See L. Halperin, "The Lands Between the Roman Empire and China", Cambridge Ancient History, xii, p. 96 ff) There also a weary missionary might persuade the Mongol horsemen to let him change secretly to the Chinese camels for a 2000-mile ride through the world's most isolated wastes to China.

^(the first Christian missionary came to the Far East)
 This is how ^A Alopen, whose name ~~as the first missionary of record~~
~~to China~~ is known to us only through the discovery in the 17th century of
 the celebrated Nestorian monument, ~~came to the Far East~~. In Chang'an he
 found, to his probably astonishment, a greater city than his own Persian
 capital of Ctesiphon. The T'ang emperor, Tai Tsung, received him with
 surprising courtesy. Perhaps it was because the Emperor's grandmother was
 a Turk, said to have been a Nestorian Christian. Or perhaps it was because
 of the Chinese love of learning. When the Emperor found that the new faith
 brought by the Persians was the religion of a book, he welcomed him with
 honor, gave him quarters in the magnificent imperial library, and ordered him
 to begin translating his Scriptures. Three years later he gave the missionary
 funds from his own treasury for the building of the first Christian church in
 China. That was the year 638 AD. Two years later, in 640, ^(and 4,000 miles away) ^{Persian} the capital ~~of~~
~~Persia~~, home of the missionaries and seat of the patriarch of Christian Asia,
 fell to the armies of a fierce and newer faith, Islam. ^{It was the beginning of the}
^{and even that first Western war, cut off from how base though it was}
^{survived and indeed}
^{spread for another}
^{300 years.}

But Christianity had come to East Asia, ^{and even that first Western war, cut off from how base though it was}
 It had come entirely by ^{survived and indeed}
^{spread for another}
^{300 years.}
 way of Asia, brought there by Asians, not westerners from Europe or America.
 Christianity is not "foreign" in Asia; it is itself Asian. That is the
 first lesson of the historical context. Let the Asian church be Asian. ^{In Sunday,}

Are there any other lessons, by way of conclusion? I recall the
 delicately phrased mandate of this lectureship that it try to be practical.

What about that first wave of mission in Asia, the Jewish-Christian,
 beginning with Thomas? Might it not suggest, if we are sensitive, that a
 certain amount of reluctance is not a bad trait for a missionary. Humility,
 and even a modicum of self-doubt are more Christian and more effective than
 arrogant self-assurance. ^{And} How better can a western missionary go to Asia,
 which still remembers the crusades, than as a slave of Jesus Christ, not a
 soldier of the cross. ^{But} don't misinterpret this. The lesson is not reluctance;
^{The real lesson is that reluctant or not those first 4 all the missionaries evangelized.}
 And the second, the Syrian wave? Its life-style was simple, often
 radically ascetic; and it spoke the language of the people. Now neither
 simple life-style nor foreign languages come easily to Americans. ^{So} We have
 more to learn than we may want to learn from those "homeless followers of
 the homeless Jesus..on ceaseless pilgrimage through this world".

The third wave was Persian; Bible-trained, theologically oriented, ^{eager to plant}

and bent on organizing ^{the} a church. Some say ^{they} ~~is~~ indigenized too fast, producing ^{those Nestorians,} a syncretistic ^{zed church} Christians with Christian signs and Buddhist minds. That may have been partly true, but it is more likely that they did not indigenize ~~fast~~ enough. When the first Nestorian wave disappeared, as it did in China in the 10th century, it was still Persian, not Chinese. After three hundred years of missions it remained a church of "foreigners" and it vanished without a trace.

But not permanently. ^{It} ~~They~~ came back again, as the church always does. Perhaps the most important lesson of all to learn from this brief survey is simply patience, and perseverance and above all, trust--trust not in the mission ^{or even the church} but in God. The church can be wiped out, but the Holy Spirit never gives up. Like the wind and the waves ^{so} ~~is~~ the Spirit. "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes." (John 3:8). The waves advance, recede; they ebb and flow. In Asia, seven waves already, and we have only looked at four. ~~Some say~~ ^{some say} In our time the tide is going out, ^{again.} Perhaps. ^{But} I doubt it. ^{And} ~~But~~ even if it is, we can ^{still} trust the Spirit. The waves ^{keep} ~~always~~ come in again, and who will give the next wave its name I do not know. ^{It may} This time ~~it could~~ ^{once again as it was so} be Asian ~~as of~~ long ago. But whatever its name it must carry the Name ~~that~~ that is above every name. And it must make that name ~~understandably~~ Chinese, and Hindi and Arabic, as in some greater Pentecost, until the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Samuel H. Moffett
Princeton, Oct. 8, 1981

1981

Mission in East Asia

II. A Personal Context: Lessons from Friends and Enemies

There is no way in the world that we can wrap up the subject of this lectureship^{"Mission in an East Asian Context"} in the three sessions[^] which Eileen and I have the joy of being with you. We have already bitten off more than we can chew. We have tried to do "the historical context"--1400 years of it, at least--and the religious context", with pictures even, all in two lectures. And now, only fifty more minutes. But East Asia contains more than a quarter of all the world's people; it holds the world's oldest imperial dynasty, its most astonishingly expanding capitalist economy, its largest communist country, its fastest growing church--in fact, the world's largest Presbyterian congregation, the world's largest Methodist congregation and the world's largest Pentecostal congregation [(it has 150,000 members in one down-town church!)] are all three in one East Asian city, the city of Seoul, Korea. So how can anyone do justice to all that in ~~the next fifty minutes~~. ^{This one last lecture.}

I won't even try. Instead, this last lecture will be another change of pace, from church history on Monday, and Asian religions yesterday, to a more personal context of mission in East Asia^{today}: lessons from friends and enemies. Lessons from experience. Personal lessons.

The first lesson is simply this: it isn't as easy as you might think to tell the difference between friend and enemy. When I came out of China I knew who my enemies were,^{I thought.} When I was asked to speak about what I had learned from the experience, I talked about lessons I had learned from my enemies the communists. Now, I am far more content than I was then to leave the judgement up to God as to who is friend and who is enemy.

I have been stabbed in the back by people I thought were ~~my~~ Christian friends. And it was a ~~communist~~, a major in the Chinese communist army who unexpectedly cleared the way for me to leave China when after two years under the communists I was arrested, tried and found guilty--~~I'm not sure~~ ^{should} I ~~should~~ confess this in Miller Chapel?--found guilty of embezzlement.

So let me speak ~~not~~ of lessons learned from my enemies the communists, ^{but} from my friends and enemies the communists, ~~friends~~ and enemies with whom I profoundly disagree but from whom I have learned much. ^{And the}

*Lesson: Missions in East Asia... were preaching the gospel to enemies as enemies
It is telling the good news to people who could be your people I should like
because of this... I heard too... That the first lesson
There are three... Three others which I learned not only from the communists, but also from my*

4 And ~~let me~~ ^{has to add} that I have been taught the same lessons by my friends the Christians of Asia. And ^{why didn't I learn} ~~best of all~~ ^{three} the very same lessons ~~first~~ should have learned long ago from Jesus Christ. Let me start with Him.

In the ninth chapter of Luke (vss. 57-62) three people came up and said to Jesus, "We believe; now we want to follow you." But Jesus' response was a surprise. He ~~almost~~ pushed them away with three sharp challenges: to one it was a challenge to sacrifice; to another the challenge to discipline; and to another, a challenge to witness. Three lessons: sacrifice, discipline and witness. But I must admit with some embarrassment that there was a time when I seemed to be learning more about sacrifice, discipline and witness from the communists than from my friends the Christians.

I. Look at the first challenge. "A certain man said unto him, Lord I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'" (Lk. 9: 57-58). ^{if you do follow me,} In other words, before you decide to follow me, count the cost. ^A Don't expect a comfortable home to live in. ~~if you follow me.~~ Now I consider it no sin to live in a comfortable home. I rather prefer it to an uncomfortable one. But I wonder sometimes how much the cause of Jesus Christ suffered simply from the fact that when the communists swept over us there in North China, I who called myself a follower and a missionary of Jesus Christ was living in comparative luxury--heated stone house, rugs, radio, refrigerator--while it was the communists of the People's Liberation Army who could say to the people, "Look. We have given up everything for you, even our homes. 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but we have not where to lay our heads'." The communists were outsacrificing us.

When Whittaker Chambers was asked by one of the jurors at the Hiss trial, "What does it mean to be a communist?", he answered with three illustrations. He said, It means to be like Djerjinsky, like Leviné, like Sazonov. Who were they? The first, Djerjinsky, was a young man in a Tsarist prison in Warsaw who insisted upon being given the dirty job of cleaning the latrines. The warden was astonished. "You want to do that? Why?" "Because," he said, "it is the duty of the most developed member of any community to take upon himself the most unpleasant task at hand." He was a communist, and the communist must be ready to clean the latrines.

As I read that my mind reluctantly snapped back to the gospel

record of a time when Jesus was trying to teach his disciples what it means to be a Christian. He ~~didn't have~~^{hadn't} much time left so he ~~used an object lesson;~~ he showed them. You ~~remember what he did.~~ He took a basin of ~~water~~ and a towel and he washed the disciples' feet. He took over for himself the lowliest and dirtiest task at hand. We don't hear much about foot-washing any more in the ~~Christian~~^{Presbyterian} church.

The second illustration was Eugene Leviné, the leader of an unsuccessful Bolshevik uprising in 1919. Captured and court-martialed he was told that he was under sentence of death. "We communists," he answered, drawing himself up straight, "are always under sentence of death."

Again my mind snapped back to the Bible. When Paul was trying to make clear to the Galatians what it really means to be a Christian, he used the phrase, "I am crucified with Christ". There, the sentence of death, the crucifixion, becomes the mark of a Christian. But does it really describe most of the comfortable Christians we know? I wonder if it really describes me?

The third illustration was Sazanov, who as a prisoner in a Siberian camp winced and agonized not at his own torture but at the tortures he saw inflicted on those around him. At last, as the only protest he could possibly make ~~against the brutalities,~~ he drenched himself with kerosene, set himself afire, and ran about until he was dead. That, said Whittaker Chambers, is communism: Djerjinsky, Leviné and Sazanov. He was wrong, as Rebecca West has pointed out. It is only one side of communism. All his illustrations were taken from the heroic period before communism came to power. I cannot forget that Djerjinski who wanted to clean out the latrines later stooped to even dirtier work; he became head of Stalin's secret police. But this much is true: false faith though communism is--^{for} it's god^{'s} the god that failed-- nevertheless it is a faith that has inspired its followers to heights of service and self-forgetfulness and sacrifices that Christians do not often match.

Do you remember that cutting remark of Dean Inge, "Christianity is a creed for heroes; and we are harmless, good-natured little people who want everybody to have a good time." ~~Have we~~^{Perhaps have} stopped calling people to sacrifice because we are too much interested in their having a good time? ~~Have we~~^{Have we have} stripped the Christian message of the scandal of the cross, not just theologic-

ally but also experientially? How many of you were told when you joined the church that being a Christian could bring you more suffering than success? Jesus said to his disciples, "I send you forth as sheep among wolves...and you will be hated for my name's sake." (Matt. 10) ~~That is what our Lord said being a follower would mean, and we have taken our church membership and so diluted it that the challenge to be a Christian for the most part involves about as much sacrifice as an invitation to join the country club. In fact to the starving, ragged countries of the world most of us Christian missionaries even, are about as effective examples of sacrifice, as the country club set. We preach the cross, but the gospel we are really preaching, whether we know it or not, is this: Become a Christian and maybe you can live as well as I. We have virtually abandoned sacrifice to the communists, to Djerjinsky, to Levine and to Sazonov.~~ ^{And by contrast,}

They told us when we first went to China, a whole year before the communists took Peking, that they were sure to win. "How do you know?", we asked. "Because the communists are willing to die, and their opponents are not.." ~~There is a Christian challenge, too, to take up the cross, but the communists out-sacrificed us.~~

Sacrifice without discipline, however, is neither a communist nor a Christian virtue. Suffering for suffering's sake can lead to pride or to self-pit^y; to hardness or to the slow acceptance of inevitable failure. Besides, it is not our cross that saves; it is Christ's. So the second challenge is to discipline. Look again at how Jesus put it. Another man said, "Lord, I will follow you, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." And Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'." (Lk. 9: 61-62).

But who does the more sentimental looking back today, the Christian or the communist? I remember the scene at the dock in Brooklyn when friends and family came to see us off for China, people practically dissolving in tears and the sound of much weeping. I am not ashamed of that. It was an expression of love. But I remember in contrast a day on a train to Shanghai talking to a young communist soldier. He was 19 years old, he said. "How long have you been in the army?" I asked. "Five years." That meant he had left home when he was 14. "What about your parents and your home," I asked.

He looked at me in disdain. "The army is my home," he said. He had put his hand to the plow, and was not looking back.

Communist discipline begins early. I talked one day to a missionary who had been captured years before by bandits in the Chinese countryside. He said he was struck by the way the bandit chief was training his men and began to wonder just what kind of an ordinary bandit chieftan this man was. New recruits had to run a mile a day, under heavy pack. Gradually the distance was increased until, my friend declared, the veterans who had been with the group for two or three years could run--not march, mind you, but run--for fifty miles without a break. I don't really know whether that is possible, but exaggeration or not the man was right about one thing. The chieftan was no ordinary bandit. Years later, the man said, he recognized that bandit chief as Chu Teh, the Red Napoleon, *commander in chief of all the liberation Armies of the Peoples Democratic Rep.*

There is something almost incredible about communist discipline. Our soft western world has been completely unprepared for its hard impact. It is more than physical, much more. It is organizational; it is moral; it is intellectual.

If you remember the Korea War, there was one startling incident that illustrates its organizational discipline, the Koje Island Prison Camp incident. The UN forces had forgotten the terrifying power of discipline, a discipline that could reach its iron hand into the disorganized, disillusioned despair of those prisoner camps and somehow transform them into ~~the~~ tight-bound structured units that were soon completely outmaneuvering their more undisciplined conquerors. Prisoners though they were, those communists, ~~they~~ they actually managed to take an American general prisoner and hold him in their camp.

Untroubled about freedom, communism can focus on a discipline so tight that in China they could not only tell a young comrade whom to marry, but then for the honeymoon send the groom north to Manchuria and the bride south to Yunnan. Its not nice, but it's discipline.

Amore admirable side to communist discipline is its moral and spiritual aspect. One can see this at its best in that from which their name derives: their fellowship of community. It takes discipline to live

together in community. Try a commune, and see. And it takes discipline to practice what we preach about race and class and individual barriers; and because we have too largely lost that discipline, the world doesn't pay a great deal of attention to our pious claims to Christian community. It is a discipline which in our day the communists are beginning to lose, but they had it ^{then} in China. The only way I could tell an officer from an enlisted man, ~~I remember~~ in the early days, was that the officers had fountain pens in the pockets of their tunics. No braid; no stripes; they were equals. But equals in a discipline. *accepted by all, leaders as well as followers.*

The most surprising of all to me was their intellectual discipline. They took what one Oxford professor has called a "half-baked philosophy", dialectical materialism, and by sheer ideological determination ~~have~~ forged it into a cutting force that has swept away the intellectuals of whole countries, whole half-continents, until respected scientists and philosophers find themselves, almost before they know it, parroting the party line and calling black white and white black. I remember a study group I was put into on the Yenching University campus in Peking. A professor was teaching us the meaning of socialism, and pointing out how British socialism was not socialism because it wasn't Russian socialism. It sounded absurd at first, then as it was repeated, and repeated, day after day we almost began to believe it. It was Greek sophism or Jesuit casuistry at its worst. It was like something out of Alice in Wonderland, but not harmless and unreal and charming like Alice in Wonderland. It ~~really~~ ^{I suppose} is a form of brain-washing, Communist discipline can take a half-truth ^{of an ideology} and hammer it into a ~~very~~ ^{not = half-truth but} convincing worldview; while we who have been given ^{lazy} the "way the truth and the life" in Jesus Christ are too ~~incoherent~~ ^{explain it as enough of} and undisciplined to take theology seriously enough to ~~hammer it out into~~ a worldview that makes sense to our philosophers and scientists. Theology takes discipline, intellectual discipline, and we have abandoned discipline to the communists.

Wrap up all these disciplines--physical, organizational, moral and intellectual--incarnate them in a human being, a communist soldier, and you have one of the best tools yet devised for conquest. Guns can't stop it. At the siege of Tsinan, the Nationalists had the guns, the communists had the discipline. They simply walked into the line of fire, and dropped where they were hit, while others came behind them, still walking forward, until at last, as they knew and planned, the guns overheated and were useless, the

No mention of the context of mission in E. Asia can learn at the Communist
But the first lesson is this....

B.

Now this doesn't mean ^{that I can't usually tell the} ~~there is no~~ difference between friend and enemy, truth and falsehood, Christian and non-Christian. ^{I wouldn't be a missionary if I didn't think that.} It simply means that friends are not always right or Christian, and enemies are not always wrong and ~~atheist~~ ^{non} Christian. And yesterday's enemy can be today's friend. ~~And friend or enemy, we all need Jesus Christ and are never beyond his love.~~ Mission in an East Asian context is ~~not~~ ^{never} ~~being~~ ^{preaching the gospel} ~~the good news~~ to enemies; ^{as enemies;} it is telling the good news to people I should love because God loves them and wants them to hear it.

Besides

~~Not long after I got out of China I was asked to speak to a group of missionary candidates in Hartford about what I thought I had learned from the experience. I remember once being not long after I got out of China being asked to speak to a group of missionary candidates in Hartford about what I had learned from the experience. I don't think I did then I at the time I spoke of learning some lessons I had learned from my enemies, the communists. I don't feel quite the same way now, either about the lessons or about that way of putting it. Let me talk about~~

Sacrifice - Mei Noh

Discipline - ~~don't break~~ prayer; Yongnah in Pusan

Witness - the greatest evangelists in the world - Yongnah -